

Introduction

Fifty-five boys — all poor and almost all African-American — were a part of a bold educational experiment in the early 1960s. They were placed in an intensive summer school program. If they finished, the headmasters of 16 prep schools agreed to accept them. Tuition paid. (Meraji, 2013)

Such was the beginning of *A Better Chance*, ‘ABC’, in 1963. ABC was founded the same year as President Kennedy delivered his “Civil Rights Address” and one year before the Civil Rights Act was passed and President Johnson declared a “War on Poverty”. ABC was the first organized effort within the overwhelmingly white private or ‘independent’ school community to actively integrate their historically white student body. A subset of private schools, self-proclaimed ‘independent schools’ are private schools that are not affiliated with any governing institution, such as the church. Amid a time of changing national policy, ABC formed the roots of race-based efforts toward educational access that became part of what is known as ‘diversity’ (Wood, 2003).

Now, elementary and high schools, colleges and universities, government organizations, businesses—and U.S. society as a whole—utilize ‘diversity’ as a marker of good, as an important goal. Even the U.S. Supreme Court has underlined the inherent benefit of ‘diversity’ (*Regents of the Univ. of Cal. v. Bakke* (1978); *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003); *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003); *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin et al* (2013; 2016)). At the same time, led by the Supreme Court, raced-based policy has been dismantled. What does ‘diversity’ mean now, then, alongside the decline of race-based policy?

This article examines the current meaning of diversity in independent schools by analyzing data interview collected from independent school insiders regarding the semantics related to diversity, the ways these schools are defining diversity, and the way these schools are operationalizing diversity. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT), I argue that the meaning of diversity has been diverted from its original course and instead, has adopted a trajectory that appears to be expansive but often undermines the original goal of diversity: namely, incorporating those individuals who had historically been disenfranchised. While diversity now seeks to encompass all forms of difference with increasing focus on *individuals* rather than groups, the original emphasis on righting past racial wrongs has been replaced by an emphasis on cultural fluency in preparation for a not-yet-realized utopian future. My article furthers previous work by showing that the implications of contemporary diversity are the continued marginalization of Black Americans in independent schools—the very group who was supposed to benefit from the creation of a diversity movement.

The Rhetoric of Diversity

In this section, I examine the history of the term “diversity” as used by the Supreme Court in rulings involving educational access for students of color and the white backlash to integration policies. As the term “diversity” comes into prominence in the Court’s decisions, so do the rulings replace the civil rights issues of educational access with issues of cultural fluency. I use these important rulings as a foundation from which to situate a similar process in schools: one where “integration” is replaced by “inclusion”.

In 1978, the Supreme Court upheld Affirmative Action in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, but Powell’s words in his famed opinion pivoted the legitimation of Affirmative Action from a racial justice imperative to a societal strength. ‘The Nation’s future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas’ (1978). He implies that the ‘Nation’s future’ requires diversity. And diversity, for Powell, while stemming from racial policy, did not stop there.

The diversity that furthers a compelling state interest encompasses a far broader array of qualifications and characteristics, of which racial or ethnic origin is but a single, though important, element. Petitioner’s special admissions program, focused solely on ethnic diversity, would hinder, rather than further, attainment of genuine diversity. (1978)

Here, the pivot from race to diversity is magnified. According to Powell, focusing only on race would actually prevent true diversity.

In subsequent decisions, the Supreme Court has consistently upheld ‘diversity’ while undercutting programs that directly seek to correct for past (and present) racial wrongs. Justice O’Connor, in her 2003 *Grutter v. Bollinger* opinion held that individualized (‘narrowly tailored’) admissions practices that emphasized the importance of diversity were constitutional and beneficial to future workers due to the globalizing of America’s companies. Further, O’Connor took an important step toward redefining diversity in a way that *any* student could claim his or her connection to diversity.

All applicants have the opportunity to highlight their own potential diversity contributions through the submission of a personal statement, letters of recommendation, and an essay describing the ways in which the applicant will contribute to the life and diversity of the Law School. (2003)

In addition to muting the importance of race in diversity, O'Connor also put a time limit on the use of race in admissions at all—but notably, she did *not* assign an arbitrary time limit to other attributes that may contribute to diversity. ‘We expect that 25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today’ (2003). The recent legal history of diversity is inexorably tied to race and at the same time positioned as intentionally not racial.

As recently as 2016, the Supreme Court, in the *Fischer v. University of Texas at Austin* rulings, the court affirmed the legality of universities seeking “diversity” of their student body and using race as one, but not the, factor. Justice Kennedy wrote, “race is but a ‘factor of a factor of a factor’” (2016) further minimizing the importance of race. Justice Kennedy went on to caution the University of Texas: “As the University examines this data, it should remain mindful that diversity takes many forms. Formalistic racial classifications may sometimes fail to capture diversity in all of its dimensions and, when used in a divisive manner, could undermine the educational benefits the University values” (2016). The language of the court has made clear that it is not racial access, but rather, educational benefits of the far more nebulous idea of “diversity” which makes race-conscious admissions legal.

The Rhetoric of Diversity: Studied

Recent research in the social sciences has shown that ‘diversity’ and similar terms, while pervasive, remain ambiguous (Downey, 1999; Silverman, 2010). Authors show that, much like the Supreme Court, Americans—particularly white Americans—consistently choose the language of ‘diversity’ over the language of ‘race’. Silverman (2010), who examined the beliefs of future teachers, also found that people more readily agree with statements about ambiguous terms of ‘diversity’ or ‘multiculturalism’ than they will with statements about ‘race’ or ‘class’. Other authors support the idea that whites are uncomfortable with specific talk about inequality, and will opt to couch these discussions using more general, inclusive, and nebulous terms (Eliasoph, 1999; Pollack, 2004).

Several authors have written critiques of new trends in ‘diversity’ (Andersen, 2001; Bell & Hartmann, 2007). ‘[W]hat makes this diversity discourse so potent and problematic is precisely the way in which it appears to engage and even celebrate differences, yet does not grasp the social inequities that accompany them’ (Bell & Hartmann, p. 910). Ahmed (2007) in her Australian study of higher education found that institutions may be able to present or represent themselves as ‘diverse’ simply by manipulating the fundamental ambiguous nature of the term ‘diversity’ without making any substantive changes to their

existing structure. Ahmed explains, “one practitioner, for instance, discussed how the term had come to mean ‘the diversity of courses’, or even the diversity of flora and fauna, within her own university” (p. 240). Thus this university is “diverse” in ways that have nothing to do with social equity or race.

This literature forms the foundation of my own research. Many of the theories presented have yet to be tested, and my research is the first to explore ‘diversity’ in the setting of the predominantly white, independent school. As learning spaces for the children of wealthy and powerful, these schools are an important setting to study the trends of ‘diversity’ rhetoric and action. In the next section, I review the recent literature that examines these elite schools in reference to both race and diversity.

Race and Diversity in Historically White Independent Schools

There is a growing literature about changes to the racial and ethnic make-up of historically white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, ‘WASP’ schools. Much of this literature, however, focuses on the college and university level of private schooling. Nevertheless, this literature adds much to the discussion of independent, K-12 schools for two reasons. First, there are parallels between private educational institutions—whether they are colleges and universities or elementary and secondary institutions. Second, private colleges and universities draw a disproportional percentage of their student bodies from independent high schools.

At the university level, scholars have documented the benefits of diversity on the academic and social experiences of all students. In both cases below, the authors define ‘diversity’ not as an institutional ideology, but rather within the bodies of students of color. Specifically, universities define “diversity” as significant representation of students of color on campus, student participation in classes or activities that teach to issues of race, and cross racial interactions between students. Denson and Chang (2009) highlighted that an increased level of engagement of students with diversity programming is associated with more positive effects on all students on campus. Park, Denson, and Bowman (2013) confirmed that diversity itself—both racial and socioeconomic—promotes a positive ‘campus racial climate’ (p. 490). This literature is particularly relevant to my study because it confirms that schools need to focus both on student racial representation as well as programming related to issues of race in order to create a more positive campus for non-white students. However, because this research focuses on college campuses, researchers looking at K-12 schools, both public and private, must question the extent of the generalizability of these findings.

In-depth studies of elite, independent schools are now beginning to appear in greater numbers. Bauman (2002), Bery (2004), Gaztambide-Fernández (2009),

and Khan (2011) all conducted research studies at one or, at most, two elite, independent schools. All of these newer studies focused on whiteness and eliteness as the foundation of their research. Bauman (2002), for example, researched white 13 and 14-year-olds in 'progressive private schools' (iii) and reported on the cultural silence that whites inhabit regarding issues of race and racial inequality. She highlighted the personal risks that are involved when a white person speaks out on these issues.

In *Best of the Best: Becoming Elite at an American Boarding School*, Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) importantly identifies that the concept of diversity is being used—by whites—to benefit whites. This usage of diversity allowed whites to justify their own diverse claims (whether they are 'geographically diverse' or have 'diverse experiences') and at the same time undercut the belonging of students of color by referring to them as 'diverse students'—and therefore not admitted because they were 'smart' (p. 162). In fact, students of color served as white's 'curriculum of diversity' (p. 166), not wholly and independently as a part of the institution.

Using a similar site for research, Khan (2011) writes about the 'adolescent elite' at another New England boarding school. Different from Gaztambide-Fernández (2009), Khan recognizes that race is salient for non-white students, but attributes disparate academic outcomes of racial groups to context rather than racism. He writes, 'Privilege is racialized not because the privileged are racist or because people of color make the wrong decisions but because historical and interactive contexts lead to different choices' (p. 190). Although allowing for historical inequality, Khan's individualized explanation lacks reference to the broad picture of continuing racial inequality in independent schools and in the US, more generally. Khan's work is symptomatic of the larger issues of individualizing inequality and ignoring broad historical trends regarding racial exclusion and access to historically white institutions.

Bery's 2004 dissertation is particularly relevant to my research because she included a critical analysis of the 'diversity industry' (p. 333) as it related to an elite white private elementary school. Within a broader study that examines the intentionality of white culture in a particular school, Bery makes an important point about diversity when she writes, 'white cultural practices encapsulate the arenas, philosophies, and methods of the diversity industry' (p. 344). The diversity industry, as she points out, was one developed by whites and therefore bears the markings of white culture. Non-whites are asked to participate as grateful beneficiaries and as 'folk experts' (p. 334). Bery's critique of the diversity industry, based on data from the late 1990s, offers a wonderful foundation to subsequent analysis of the diversity movement, more generally.

Theoretical Framework

The fundamental question that inspired my project was this: how does contemporary diversity in independent schools relate to the race-focused beginnings of the diversity movement? Because race is a focal element of this study, Critical Race Theory (CRT) presented a natural framework with which to analyze data. A central tenet of CRT identified by Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) is the fact that ‘racism is endemic to American life’ (p. 6). This statement implies that scholars should not only be considering race in their research, but that race should be centered in research—particularly for the reason of asking how ‘traditional interests and values serve as vessels of racial subordination’ (p. 6). Also foundational to CRT is the perspective that race and racism are social constructions, the basis of which lies in U.S. law (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas, 1995, p. xxv). CRT likewise demands that scholarship be contextual both to time and situation as well as based in the experiential knowledge of communities of color (Matsuda et al 1993, p. 6). While there is much more that serves as the foundation to CRT, I have highlighted here the central tenets that are most relevant for the analysis of my data. Below, I offer explanations of foundational and influential pieces of CRT writing that directly relate to my project. Specifically, I will look at Cheryl Harris’ concept of ‘whiteness as property’ (1995), Alan David Freeman’s description of the ‘perpetrator perspective’ (1995) and Derrick Bell’s concept of ‘interest convergence’.

In her article ‘Whiteness as Property’ (1995) Harris traces the comingled birth of property rights and race in the United States. The right to legally own property was a racial distinction and with guarded boundaries around whiteness/property owner. In addition, she highlights the ways in which whiteness is, both theoretically and functionally, property of its owner. Among other rights accorded to property owners is the ‘absolute right to exclude’ (p. 282). Whiteness, Harris points out, was legally built upon exclusionary practices ‘determining who was or was not white enough to enjoy the privileges accompanying whiteness’ (p. 282). Themes of power and exclusion run throughout Harris’ argument. These themes are particularly valuable to my discussion of exclusion and inclusion in historically white independent schools.

Freeman’s argument in ‘Legitimizing Racial Discrimination through Antidiscrimination Law’ (1995) stems from his descriptions of the ‘perpetrator perspective’ (p. 29). The ‘perpetrator perspective’ understands racial discrimination as a ‘series of actions’ (p. 29) which means that discrimination is reduced to specific perpetrators, specific victims, and specific actions—overlooking the ‘overall life situation’ (p. 29) of victims as a group. U.S. antidiscrimination law, Freeman argues, is wrapped up in the perpetrator

perspective. This has meant individualizing discriminatory actions rather than acknowledging or addressing the structural aspects of the effects of racism. Further, race-neutral or ‘color-blind’ policy that advocates the theoretical irrelevance of race is operating on the assumption that some day, we will live in a world where race and social hierarchy are not connected (p. 35).

In his essay, ‘Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma’, Bell explains his principle of ‘interest convergence’. Simply, he explains: ‘The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites’ (p. 22). Regarding the Brown case, Bell warns that the ‘mandatory assignment of black and white children to the same schools’ (p. 26) may result in the visual illusion of integration (although massive numbers of white families fled integrated districts) that pacifies whites’ moral objection to segregation without addressing the underlying issue of educational efficacy for Black students.

I will use the theoretical contributions of Freeman, Harris, and Bell to analyze the findings from this study. In addition, I bring in the work of more current Critical Theorists, Lipsitz (1998) and Spade (2015), in the analysis and conclusion sections in order to bring clarity to the meaning of “diversity” in independent schools and how this meaning serves to derail progress toward racial equity in these institutions.

Site of the Research

This research looks closely at independent day schools in the northeastern part of the U.S. Day schools represent 86.0% of all schools within the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), and they serve 86.5% of all students within the NAIS (NAIS, 2016b).¹ By focusing on day schools, I am researching the largest sector of independent schools and at the same time, moving away from previous research that overwhelmingly focused on boarding schools.

Independent schools have a history of privilege and power. Many of these schools are well over a century old, and they continue the legacy of placing their graduates in the highest ranking and most prestigious colleges and universities. Graduates from these schools will be well represented within the next generation of the country’s top executives, politicians, doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. The environment within which these students learn about race and racial difference will undoubtedly have a marked effect on the way that the most powerful stratum of our society understands and engages with issues of race, integration, difference, and inequality.

¹ The NAIS is an organization whose mission is to be the “national voice of independent education, advocating on behalf of its members” (2013). According to their published data, the NAIS counts 79.32% of all independent schools as members (2016b, 2016c).

Important to the topic of this article, independent schools define race in ways different than other institutions—including the U.S. government. The NAIS collects racial data on students using the following categories: African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander American, Multiracial American, Middle Eastern American, European American, and International. All but European American and International students combine into a category that the NAIS labels ‘Students of Color’. Middle Eastern Americans, while certainly a more recognized category post 9/11, are still considered to be ‘white’ by the U.S. Census. Also, the NAIS labels indicate a conflation of what sociologists and other social scientists term ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’. According to the US Census, ‘Hispanic/Latino’ is an ethnic, not a racial designation. In these data, a white Hispanic student and a Black Hispanic student are both deemed to be ‘students of color’. The fact that the NAIS uses different racial categories than other educational institutions supports the notion that independent schools should be researched as a unique group.

Data & Methods

As a white researcher asking direct questions about race and racial policy at schools, I was aware of my opportunity to ask questions of white respondents knowing that I was more likely to get truthful opinions about the state of diversity. The notion of ‘racial bonding’ is well documented by Tatum (1997) who notes that whites speak more freely with other whites when conversing about topics grounded in race (p. 195). Likewise, Tatum speaks directly to the ‘paralysis of fear’ (p. 194) that whites feel when trying to talk about race with people of color. However, I also knew that many of the diversity practitioners in independent schools are people of color, and I needed to make every effort to encourage open conversations about race despite my whiteness. In many cases, I asked former colleagues for an email of introduction to a Diversity Coordinator with whom they were familiar; I was confident that this was the best and perhaps only approach to researching at such insular institutions and about a topic that inspires silence between races more often than not (Pollock, 2004).

After reaching out to several diversity practitioners directly, the sample snowballed as participants offered names of other schools and individuals with whom they thought I should speak. In some cases, participants went so far as to set up interviews on my behalf with school personnel they knew to be invested in the topic of diversity. I made an effort to ensure that several states were represented and that the schools in the study were both urban and suburban. The states represented by the eight schools in this sample are New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with between one and three participants from each school for a total of twelve participants. It is difficult to enumerate the participants according to their job title because many participants acted in multiple roles within their institution. Nevertheless, participants roles included (a) Heads of School, (b) Diversity Coordinators, (c) Admissions Officers, (d) Upper Level Administration, (e) Faculty, (f) Alumnae, and (g) Parents.

To support the data collected from within schools, I interviewed three additional participants whose work links to diversity in independent schools. These three participants were (a) a senior representative of the National Association of Independent Schools, (b) a Diversity Consultant, and (c) a senior administrator at a company whose mission is to prepare low income students of color to enroll in independent schools.

Each of the interviews was guided by the following questions:

- 1) How does your school (or independent schools more generally for the three non-school-based interviews) define diversity/multiculturalism/ inclusion? Prior to interviews, I researched the specific terminology used by each school/office and in the interviews, I introduced the subject using the terminology that the school/office used.
- 2) What programming efforts has your school (or independent schools more generally) made regarding diversity/multiculturalism /inclusion?

Every participant brought up enrollment of students and hiring of faculty and staff as part of their interview. I used this opportunity to ask about the racial representation of students, faculty, and staff within specific schools and across the independent school community.

Of the fifteen total respondents, thirteen agreed to have their interviews audio-recorded. In addition, I took notes both during and after each interview. I transcribed each of these recordings verbatim and coded the resulting transcription by word usage and theme patterning. Two participants chose not to be recorded, and I took notes both during and after these interviews, including direct quotes for the most relevant data. Again, these notes were coded by theme patterning.

In support of the interview data, I analyzed the patterns of enrollment of students of color in the independent school system from the 2001-2002 school year through the 2015-2016 school year. Yearly data collected by the NAIS is

publically available, and I utilized this data to report on enrollment and hiring trends.

Finally, I conducted content analyses of published and web-based materials from both individual schools and the NAIS in order to trace the public discussion of race and integration over time. Each of the participating schools and the NAIS has a portion of its website dedicated to issues of diversity (or multiculturalism or inclusion). In addition, the NAIS publishes a quarterly journal, *Independent School Magazine*, which includes articles on diversity practices. All of these materials were analyzed for their references to diversity and related themes, and for enrollment and hiring data when available.

Findings

When it comes to diversity work, there were three distinct but interrelated areas about which participants offered data. Those areas were (1) semantics: what terms are school personnel using, (2) definitions: what do these terms signify, and (3) actions: what do school personnel point to as examples of this work. All three of these areas worked together to present the larger meaning of diversity work. This findings section will be divided into the areas of semantics, definitions, and actions in order to present data on all aspects of diversity.

Semantics: What terms are school personnel using?

Like any other social group, independent schools and those working with independent schools are in a continual state of developing, defining, and changing their language. Language pertaining to diversity is no exception. Efforts that began as ‘racial integration’ have gone through verbal shape-shifting over the decades. To a certain extent, those in the inner circle of diversity practitioners in independent schools have taken to calling it, simply, ‘The Work’ both as a shibboleth and in an effort to find a common term to use instead of the variety of labels attached to the same efforts in different institutions. One Head of School began his explanation of efforts in the following way, ‘Well this whole area of work, or “The Work”, as we, as we say...’ (Head of School).

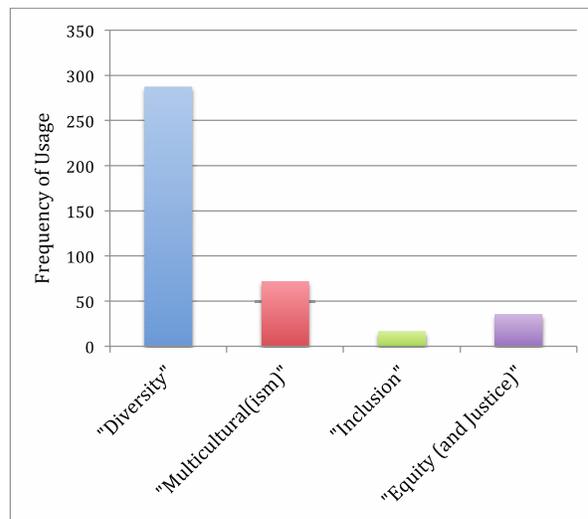
However, schools cannot simply put ‘The Work’ on their websites and expect visitors to understand what ‘The Work’ means. Schools have each gone through their own history with terminology and have come to rationalize their very intentional choices. The excerpt below is an example from one school:

We went through the period of ‘diversity’, and then we went to ‘multiculturalism’, then we came back to ‘diversity’. Now we’ve kind of gotten into ‘equity and justice’ as being kind of the terms

used for ‘The Work’ as we call it, quote, unquote (Diversity Coordinator).

As other researchers have also found, there is a difference between formal definitions of words like ‘diversity’ and ‘multiculturalism’ and the colloquial uses of such words among educators (Silverman, 2010). Despite all of the effort gone into developing and defining new terms, school personnel still use ‘diversity’ as the primary term to describe *all* efforts in this area. Figure 1 catalogs the number of times that each of the related terms used by current school faculty and administrators in their interviews with me. Overwhelmingly, ‘diversity’ remains the most frequently uttered of these terms.

Figure 1: Terms Used by Participants



Schools’ programming in this area was largely the same despite different titles for their specific programs. In this article, I will continue use the term ‘diversity’ to signify a school’s work in any of the defined areas above for two reasons. First, for the sake of clarity, it is easier to refer to similar work with the same name when the difference among the commonly used terms is truly semantic. Second, for the sake of anonymity, it is more responsible as a researcher not to refer to the specific names or labels given by certain schools as that would compromise their ability to remain anonymous participants in this study.

Definitions: What do these terms signify?

Participants agreed that which diversity began, it was about race—and African Americans, in particular (Speede-Franklin 1988). However, the focus of

'The Work' has expanded tremendously since 'diversity' first appeared on the independent school scene. The word 'diversity' has recently been used in the title of a number of articles in the NAIS publication, *Independent School Magazine*. The subject matter addressed in these articles in the last decade included 'cultural' diversity, 'gender' diversity, 'ecological' diversity, and 'learning style' diversity, among others (McDonald & Riendeau, 2003; NAIS, 2005; Romney, Ferron & Hill, 2008). An NAIS representative spoke to the history of the language used as evidence of diversity work moving beyond its racial beginnings: 'And the language, if you notice...well, I've seen earlier versions and the language before was more race-based and the language now is more diversity based' (NAIS Representative). Other participants also spoke directly to the history of diversity: 'it started out, I think, based in race, but I think very quickly people saw that it was more than race, and it...a lot of the work NAIS did was based on what they call the eight cultural identifiers. So, race was there, class, gender, religion, ah...ageism, sexism, ah... homophobia...' (Diversity Coordinator). Despite noting the 'eight' identifiers, this participant stopped his recitation after only seven; he forgot 'ability' which is the broadly accepted eighth identifier.

The Diversity Coordinator's words quoted above were virtually identical to the other participants, and by citing the NAIS, this Diversity Coordinator underlined that each school alone did not generate its definition of diversity. Rather, the use of 'diversity' and the meaning of 'diversity' are social phenomena within the independent school system supported by a broader historical context provided by the Supreme Court cases cited earlier.

As a social echo of O'Connor's (2003) words, 'inclusion' is the new form of diversity. In the distant past lies the issue of Black American access to historically white schools. Today, independent schools are speaking about acknowledging difference. Participants expressed this clearly:

...[we are] trying to be inclusive, trying to make sure that different lenses and perspectives are being respected and looked upon (Diversity Coordinator).

Diversity is not about, you know, just about equity and justice, but it's really about how do you get the broadest and varied ideas on to the table that you can have a tug-of-war about and then try to figure out what's best (Head of School).

Perhaps even more telling than the descriptions of an inclusion philosophy are the reasons that faculty and administrators give in support of current efforts toward an Inclusion program. It is not about equity. It is about cultural fluency.

I mean, this is who you're going to be interacting with. And you're going to come across many different ideas and thoughts, and you should be able to deal with those ideas and thoughts in a safe place and have those conversations about these things and being able to form your own identity from um, from a place where you're being influenced from many different directions, not just one (Faculty Member).

And one of our teachers said, 'well, they should really call it Cosmopolitanism'...and the whole idea is that I want students to not fear other people that they don't know (Diversity Coordinator).

Indeed, the description of current diversity work is more closely connected to Appiah's (2007) notion of 'Cosmopolitanism' where individuals seek to respect and benefit from the inherent value in human difference rather than to continue the work of the Civil Rights movement or anti-racist work, more generally.

Actions: What do school personnel point to as examples of their work?

The actions that schools take relative to diversity work are telling as to the intentions behind the new meaning of diversity. Whether those actions are school celebrations, students clubs, or academic work, it is again clear that the focus of diversity is an all-inclusive approach.

One persistent form of diversity is the 'cultural celebration'. These "celebrations" serve to *use* students of color and their cultures to project an image of an integrated and happy school. For example, many schools in my study planned an 'international' event that would highlight the food and dance of numerous cultures. One Diversity Coordinator described 'heritage assemblies' at his school that focused on a variety of racial, ethnic, and religious groups. Another Diversity Coordinator explained his struggles with creating special events for each group on campus:

So now I've got a group of kids that are Israeli, and all of the sudden they want to do stuff. I've got my Asian kids now saying, you know, Chinese New Year's coming up, we've got this coming up, um, I've got my, my Indian students saying Diwali's coming up, you know, festival of lights. And everybody's starting to be more--wanting to be...and I'm going, 'Look, we cannot do assemblies every week of this magnitude. It takes months to plan this. But, let's do something. I want to make sure that you're represented here, so what can we do?' (Diversity Coordinator).

Participants make it clear: diversity is about celebrating each cultural and racial group.

Many schools also point to Upper School (9th-12th grade) student clubs as evidence of their diversity work. In this sample, most of the school representatives spoke about their school's cultural awareness clubs when discussing diversity initiatives. As opposed to colleges, universities, and other organizations that support affinity groups such as a Latino student group or a Black student group, many independent high schools choose to support a cultural club to which everyone is invited. These clubs have names that emphasized inclusivity: 'Cultural Awareness for Everyone', 'United Students', and 'Common Ground' are a few examples of names that appear many times within the independent school community. One Head of School put it simply, 'we have CAFÉ which is Cultural Awareness for Everyone. Everybody, anybody can come' (*Head of School*).

For many schools, diversity clubs are their institutional nod to bringing interested students together while intentionally dismissing the idea of affinity groupings. Several participants reported heated reactions from white teachers, parents, and students about the idea of affinity groups geared toward a single racial or ethnic category. Below are just a couple examples of such reactions:

'Affinity groups are divisive' (*Diversity Coordinator*).

'It's a hot-button topic here.' (*Head of School*).

Clubs that 'include all', rather than those that aim to support specific racial or ethnic groups, are less problematic for schools because there is no white backlash. While they may not admit a connection between the two, school personnel avoid backlash by supporting these 'inclusive' clubs that appear, my data indicate, in greater numbers on independent school campuses than affinity groups.

Academics are the focus of independent schools, and so it is vital to examine the extent to which diversity is appearing in schools' curricula. Several schools designed special courses for their Upper School students that fit with their diversity initiatives. One Head of School offered, '...I teach a seminar for all freshmen here, I just started that this year, and I call it Diversity, Ethics, and Globalization. And, you know, it's not a tight curriculum by any stretch of the imagination' (*Head of School*). Courses such as these meet once or twice a week, as opposed to the core academic courses. While schools may be beginning to bring diversity into the required part of their curricula, it is important to note that in my sample, these schools approach diversity with an emphasis on thinking and communication skills as opposed to historical and current experiences related to

any type of inequality. Also, while diversity may be required, such courses are relegated to 'special' and often non-academic standing.

One Head of school who has been celebrated for his 'cutting edge' diversity work proudly described a new course in his Upper School:

There's an exciting... mini-course that's being taught in the Upper School in February. So I have my Chinese teacher and my French teacher they are gonna collaborate with the two classes. And at first you'd think, you know, why would a Chinese and French teacher teach, you know, work together? But then we're gonna add a business component. And we happen to have two [business] executives...work here. They are French, conduct a lot of business in China so what we're going to try to tell the kids is, you know, if you were to have a joint French-Chinese venture, what are the issues you would have to deal with? How would you go about it? ...So this is more a matter of, you know, how can you make money, earn a livelihood somewhere else that you are unfamiliar with? And what we know about successful businesses: they actually get to know the place and the culture and the customs (*Head of School*).

This example shows that diversity is now about preparing the students to be more successful in their places of business by exposing them to a variety of perspectives and cultures: the perfect education for future CEOs in a globalized marketplace.

Indeed, a great number of schools and school personnel place significant and increasing emphasis on 'globalism'. Several participants reported this trend:

'Some schools respond to the call for inclusion by focusing on global...'
(*Head of School*).

'So, what you will see at a lot of schools, you see it on their web pages...um, this embracing globalism...'
(*Diversity Consultant*).

Another school had an entire section of its website dedicated to 'World Perspectives'.

Schools are moving away from the specific issues of racial and class inequality raised at the start of the diversity movement and toward a revision of diversity that 'includes' even the already celebrated and the already privileged. Further, schools are increasingly operationalizing diversity with an emphasis on global literacy for the traditional consumers of independent schooling: the white

and the wealthy. This ‘global inclusion’ takes the emphasis entirely away from any local or school-wide inequality which was the inspiration for diversity in the first place.

Analyzing Inclusion

Fearing the ‘Political’ Issue?

Why is the momentum of the diversity movement one of expansion? Why is it that the independent school system seems to have a limited attention span when it comes to certain topics relating to diversity—specifically to race? Respondents pointed out that racial diversity, as well as other forms of diversity, are politicized issues, and schools do not want to hang out in the realm of politics.

And as soon as we talk about race or ethnicity or religion or sexual orientation, sexual identity, it becomes politicized. And it becomes seen as a negative (*Diversity Coordinator*).

Perhaps the problem is not merely that these issues are political, it’s that these issues are often on the opposite political side of those who historically have attended independent schools. Bell’s (1995) theory of ‘interest convergence’ is particularly relevant here. It is predictable that discussions of inequality would threaten the legitimacy of the existing power structure in schools, and therefore not be in the interest of those in power. Investigating inequality from the perspective of those excluded by the power structure, as Freeman (1995) advocates, means investigating the current power structure that enables the wealthy to hoard the benefits of wealth (Tilly, 1998): in this case, independent schooling. This may shed some light on why schools expand diversity to address the ‘big eight’ cultural identifiers instead of continuing a focus on race and class. Race and class are the historic and continued lines of separation between the social group in independent schools and the rest of society. To invite in less wealthy, non-white families would be introducing entirely new members to the social group. However, it is in the interest of many white, wealthy families to address issues of sexuality and (dis)ability because sexuality and ability are variant within this group that holds privilege when it comes to race and class.

I do not mean to imply that issues of sexuality, sexual orientation, and disability should not be addressed—they absolutely should – but they present completely differently from racial equality issues because sexuality, sexual orientation, and disability cut across racial and socio-economic lines. As a result, those holding historical places of privilege, i.e. wealthy whites, are well positioned to address these issues because they are personally motivated to do so.

This stands in sharp contrast to racial concerns because, racial inequality, by its very nature means that those holding historical places of power are not personally motivated to address the issue – leaving a void of ‘interest conversion’. And so, by expanding the definition of diversity, there is less focused attention on bringing in historic racial ‘outsiders’ and more attention on acknowledging those ‘others’ who are already present within the walls of independent schooling.

Experienced diversity practitioners want to make progress, and they will take whatever routes enable them to move toward their goals. Diversity practitioners assert in unison that the way to make progress is to find ways to include everybody in their diversity efforts and, specifically, to make even the wealthy and the white feel that they and their children benefit from diversity.

What had helped us enormously in the work is shifting white parents’ understanding from...they formerly thought this was just about closing the achievement gap for Black kids, giving them access, to hey, we all learn better in diverse environments. My kids will benefit from this, too (*Head of School*).

Um...there was a, one of my mentors...used to say, ...she would say you need to get them on channel WIFM—what’s in it for me (*Diversity Consultant*).

The difficulty with the notion that in order to make any progress, we must find those areas of ‘interest convergence’ is that diversity practitioners are actors within the white, wealthy institution of independent schooling. By not acknowledging the firm presence of racism within their institution, independent schools promote the unequal status quo. CRT insists that we unmask existing racism—not avoid discussion of racism out of fear of white backlash. Bell writes, ‘Racism is too ingrained in American society to be eradicated by indirection. ‘Doing good by stealth’ seems, at least in the American context, a contradiction in terms’ (1981, p. 846). By CRT standards, diversity practitioners who seek ‘progress’ through inclusion are actually avoiding the centrality of racism in their institutions, and therefore perpetuating the unequal status quo.

Ironies of Inclusion

Independent schools handpick their community: from students to faculty to staff all the way on up to the Board of Trustees. The history and tradition of independent schools is one of exclusion. Exclusion is fundamentally how these schools create and maintain a position of power within the broader educational community and perpetuate the mystique of their superiority.

Within the context of independent schooling, ‘inclusion’ is about all forms of difference, particularly about difference in ideas and perspective. ‘Inclusion’ is a passive way of saying that there is someone who has the power to include—or not. Baglieri et al (2011) write that by labeling some people as being ‘of color’, we position these people as ‘others’, as a ‘deviation from the norm’. The very notion of ‘inclusion’, therefore, requires that the ‘normal’ state is one of *exclusion*.

Our status quo in America, and certainly in the independent school system, is one of historic whiteness, and this demands recognition. Harris’ (1995) ‘whiteness as property’ is particularly relevant here. Whites literally owned independent schools at their founding. Add to that the fact that current families pay enormous amounts of money in tuition each year (a median of \$22,784 for 12th graders in day schools and \$49,300 for 12th graders in 7-day boarding schools (NAIS, 2016b)) in a country where median household income is \$51,371 (Noss, 2013). This contributes to the sense of wealthy families’ ownership of their children’s school. The powerful constituencies of (1) wealthy parents and (2) alums in independent schools have significant influence on the operation of these institutions. That this power and sense of ownership is inexorably linked to race is as clear as it is problematic.

The whiteness of independent schools is neither accidental nor innocent: whiteness is protected, time and time again, throughout the history of independent schools (Clotfelter, 2004; Green, 2004). One example of the purposeful whiteness of independent schools comes from a description given by one participant upon arriving as a first year teacher at a New England independent school:

...So I noticed that it was very white. And ‘white’ meaning like an established white. It was like it was on purpose that it was white. It was like, we’re here. We don’t have any signs about where we are, there’s no sign at the end of the street, there is no sign at the gate to say, ‘this is an exclusive environment’. If you are here you have to have been invited or you have an on-going cycle of connection with this place (*Admissions Director*).

This participant’s language of *invitation* underscores that it has historically been within whites’ power to do the inviting.

Those participants who were struggling with the ‘inclusive’ exclusive institution consistently related race and class (often the intersection of these two) to exclusion, and with good reason. In this country, our financial and racial histories are intertwined. It is not that all white people are wealthy, but rather that most wealthy people are white (Kochhar, Fry & Taylor, 2011; Massey & Denton,

1993; Oliver & Shapiro, 2006). Crenshaw et al. add, ‘economic exploitation and poverty have been central features of racial domination, and poverty is its long-term result’ (1995, p. 109). It is no wonder that independent schools, charging between \$20,000 and \$50,000 a year for tuition, continue to be vastly white. This underscores my earlier point that diversity may be making significant headway for those who are already included, but these institutions are struggling with the persistence and justification of continued racial and socio-economic *exclusion* that is apparent in independent schools.

Interestingly, participants were willing to claim the historic and continued exclusivity of independent schools, the negative side of exclusivity was always rationalized away for one reason or another. One common follow-up to an explanation of exclusivity was by placing emphasis on the few poor, Black students that did benefit from an independent school education. A Diversity Consultant offered the examples of President Obama, who attended an independent school in Hawaii and of Governor Deval Patrick of Massachusetts, who attended an independent school in Massachusetts:

And our schools are, they are elite institutions. We don’t have to apologize for that if we don’t behave in a way that’s elitist. Um, we can provide, we can change lives... (*Diversity Consultant*).

Independent schools are no longer exclusively white institutions, they are predominantly white institutions, and they serve as a foundation for graduates who are ‘success stories’—for whom elite education most simply changed their lives. Absolutely. But those students are not common. In fact, supporters of the ‘exception’ ideology reveal themselves as using Freeman’s (1995) ‘perpetrator perspective’. By individualizing the outcomes of independent schooling, we can highlight the success of the few while disregarding the exclusion of the many.

Lipsitz (2006) writes “...the long history of interracial relations has also created a possessive investment in whiteness that entails embracing people of color and their cultures in condescending and controlling ways” (2006). This is especially helpful in analyzing the study-wide trends of (1) locating “diversity” in the relatively few bodies of students of color and controlling the message about what those bodies mean. The presence of students of color serves as a long-term *investment* in order to retain the whiteness of the institution. These students physically represent racial progress without progression within the structure of the institution. Further, the exclusivity of these white institutions underlines the *control* that the institution has over exactly who will and will not be invited to attend.

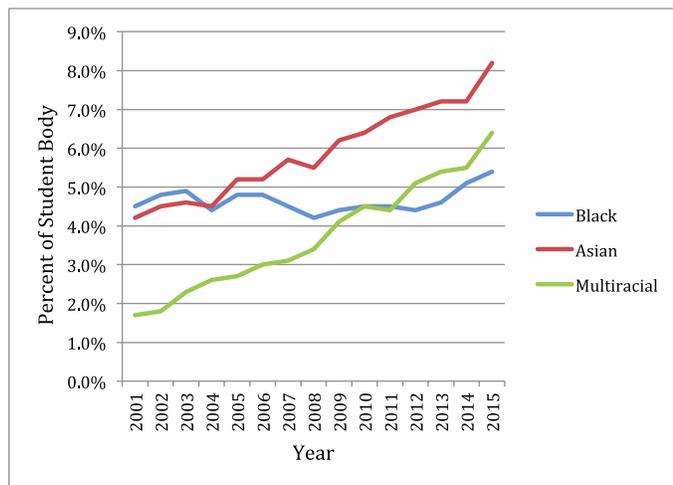
Diversity and Numbers

For a moment, I will return to the original mandate that served as the foundation for the diversity movement: enroll more Black students in historically white schools. As of 2016, the NAIS reported that 29.0% of all students in day schools were students of color. Remember that the NAIS defines ‘students of color’ as African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander American, Multiracial American, or Middle Eastern American. This shows a substantial increase in ‘students of color’ since 2001 when the NAIS reported 19.1% ‘students of color’ (NAIS, 2016b), and a drastic change from 4.0% in 1970 (Speede-Franklin, 1988, p. 25).

The percent of Black students in independent schools in 1970 was 3.7% (Speede-Franklin, 1988, p. 25). In 2016, the percent of Black students was 6.4% (NAIS, 2016b). In the 43 years that ‘students of color’ have grown by 25.0%, Black student representation, nationally, has only increased by 2.7%.

The story is even more depressing in New England, which was the center of my research. Figure 2 shows the stagnancy of the Black student population in New England schools over the past 12 school years. Figure 2 also reveals the dramatic increase of Asian and Multiracial representation over the same time period (NAIS, 2016a).

Figure 2: Asian, Black and Multiracial Students in New England Independent Schools



CRT demands that we examine the situations of people of color in an historical and contextual way. Further, Freeman (1995) argues that CRT scholars must look at group outcomes as evidence of successful or failed anti-racist policy. These numbers, as evidence of the effects of diversity policy, demonstrate that

diversity is failing in its mission to address racial inequality, particularly for Black students. The reasons for the lack of growth in the Black student population are, on the one hand, varied and complex including residential segregation and transportation issues, money, and persistent racial discrimination (see French, 2013 for an in-depth exploration of these reasons). On the other hand, the explanation is simple: an inclusive, ‘perpetrator’ stance on diversity has meant an abandonment of the social justice ideals that sparked the diversity movement in the first place.

Conclusion: Why inclusion prevents equity.

The data show that independent schools in the northeast define diversity as an all-inclusive movement that aims to highlight individual difference in an effort to broaden conversation and prepare the future power elite for their leadership roles in a globalizing market. Bell’s (1995) ‘interest convergence’ prediction that the cause of racial justice would only be furthered when it benefitted whites is not only applicable to independent schools, it is the expressed foundation of diversity work. Diversity practitioners are intentionally framing diversity as a benefit to wealthy whites, and at the same time removing explicit racial justice goals. This leads to the second finding: the data show that while diversity efforts may have corresponded with increased ‘students of color’, although many of those ‘students of color’ would be deemed ‘white’ in other spaces, diversity has not corresponded to any notable increase in the Black student population at these elite day schools.

The meaning of diversity in independent schools plays an important role in the continued exclusion of Black students. Bery (2004) found that the ‘diversity industry’ is a white construction and therefore bears the markings of white culture. I agree with Bery and take her argument one step further. Diversity is not merely white, it is a concept built and enacted by ‘perpetrators’ within a racist society. Freeman (1995) explained that policy borne from the ‘perpetrator perspective’ over-individualizes the experience of racism and attempts to enact policy with a color-blind, utopian vision of what our world *could* look like, but not what our world *does* look like.

Over-individualizing and utopian are apt descriptors of diversity today. Diversity practitioners in independent schools state that their institution is ‘inclusive’—a place where every person has a voice and where individual differences are celebrated. Trinity School, often the top-ranked prep school in the country by Forbes and other publications, published the following Diversity Statement:

Trinity strives to create an educational environment that is inclusive and in which every member of the faculty and staff,

every student, and every family, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, or sexual orientation, is a valued member of the community. (Trinity School, 2014)

This statement is similar to most others: it unquestionably speaks about *individuals* and at the same time is clearly operating from the *hope* of being a non-racist, non-classist, etc. institution. When schools make policy about what they hope the world will be, rather than what the world is, the policy has no chance to affect real change.

Going further, Spade (2015) builds from Freeman's perpetrator perspective to underline the ways in which current civil rights laws actually *undermine* progress for historically marginalized groups because the individualization of racism conceals the systemic ways in which racism functions and persists. Both Freeman's foundation and Spade's important addition to the perpetrator perspective help to understanding the findings in my study. Creating a meaning of "diversity" that lives in the bodies of individuals and at the same time outside of the realm of current reality serves not only to halt progress toward racial equity, but also to further entrench existing racial inequality. Whites' "property" (Harris, 1995) in the form of independent schools, remain white. Diversity and inclusion are white concepts that serve to preserve the whiteness of these institutions.

Future research is needed in three primary areas. First, this study should be replicated in different areas of the country to gain a sense of the generalizability of my findings. The south and the west, for instance, have different racial histories than the northeast, and so it is important that researchers examine (1) whether diversity is conceptualized in the same way in these regions and (2) what groups are and are not served by the diversity movement.

Second, an in-depth financial analysis of independent schools is needed in order to gauge the feasibility of social change within these institutions given their reliance on tuition. Of schools in my study, tuition represented between 77% and 95% of the annual operating budget. Does this reliance on tuition mean that schools are not structured in a way to support social change? In the midst of pressures to remain 'elite'—including cutting edge technology programs, new building structures, and state of the art sports and arts facilities—how are schools prioritizing Black student and other minority student enrollment in terms of the funds that they allocate toward this goal? Research that examines these questions would add immeasurably to an honest conversation about social justice, diversity, and institutional goals.

Finally, there is some evidence that the diversity movement more generally—i.e. in institutions other than independent schools—has yielded similar results to those in my study. Supreme Court opinions, as I wrote earlier, have

shown an increasing emphasis on diversity and a decreasing emphasis on racial justice. Is this phenomenon present in other institutions, as well? Diversity goals are part of businesses, organizations, and government entities across this country. To what extent are the findings from this study replicable outside of the sphere of education?

Diversity, at first glance, may present as a well-intentioned, progressive policy. However, the outcomes of diversity are far from the initial goals to lessen racial inequality in historically and predominantly white institutions. Many, primarily poor Black students, remain excluded from these schools. Diversity is particularly insidious as a movement because it can be explained as an 'inclusive' effort while at the same time fortifying the status quo of racial inequality. This is the inevitable outcome of diversity policy that is designed to include and benefit wealthy whites. Dreaming of a place where individuals are equally included and celebrated means ignoring the current exclusion and inequality of entire groups of people. I sincerely hope that predominantly white institutions will take a hard look at their existing diversity efforts and choose to examine their world as it *is*.

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